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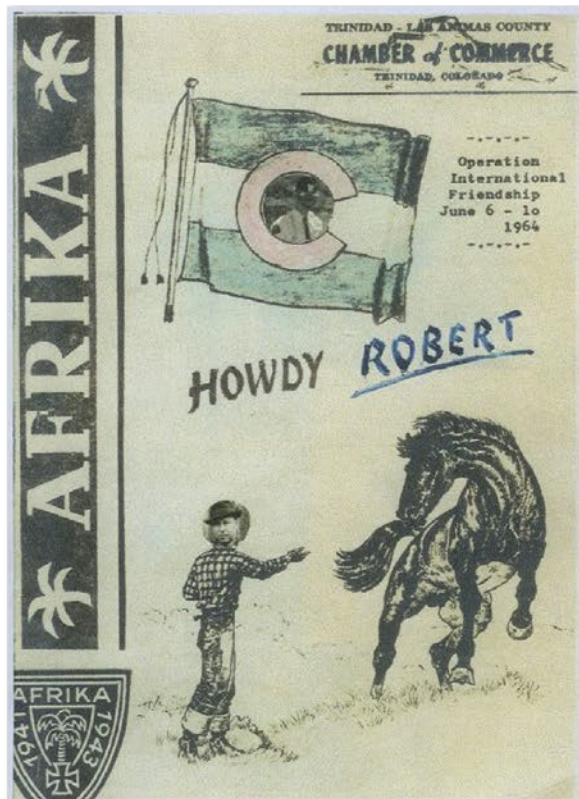
A Bygone Era - German POWs in Trinidad

By: Bob Christofferson, '65

READ TIME: 4 MINUTES



In the spring of 1964, I had completed my first year at Trinidad State majoring in Law Enforcement Technology and was preparing to go to work at Central City Police Department for the summer. The Director of the cadet program notified me I had been selected along with five other cadets to assist with a program that involved a group of foreign dignitaries and their wives. We were assigned to escort several former German prisoners of war (POWs) to specific activities during Operation International Friendship, to be held from June 6 -10, 1964.



The program was hosted by the City of Trinidad, the Las Animas County Chamber of Commerce and Trinidad State Jr. College. There were about twenty former German soldiers and officers from the AFRIKA Corps who had been captured in Europe by Allied Forces and transported to the prisoner of war camp at Trinidad, Colorado. June 6th was chosen because twenty years earlier our Allied forces invaded Normandy (D-Day), which was the beginning of the end of WW II.

Program Flyer from TLAC Chamber of Commerce

On June 6, 1964 our friends and their wives arrived at Stapleton Field, Denver and received a welcome address from Governor John Love at the State Capitol. We then drove to Colorado Springs where they toured the recently opened Air Force Academy and then to the Royal Gorge.

There were many activities scheduled, but the one I enjoyed most was visiting the site of the former POW camp located about twenty miles east of Trinidad on Hwy 160. As we arrived we saw that only the foundations remained of the structures that had been present some thirty years prior.

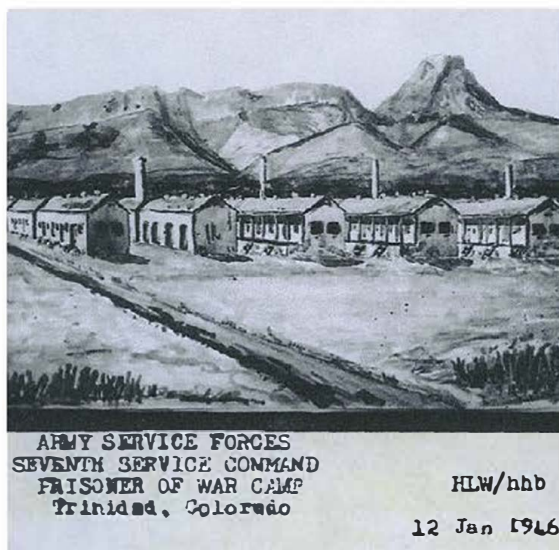


Foundation Remnants at Trinidad POW Camp Site

As our friends walked around the area they began remembering. Then they began verbalizing their memories, and as more of them began verbalizing their experiences the entire camp seemed to come alive.

Several of them recalled their attempt to dig an escape tunnel from beneath one of the barracks in a westerly direction to reach the outer fence line, so that they could escape captivity. They reported all was going well until a two and a half ton U.S. Army truck ran over the tunnel as it passed under a road, causing it to collapse. Thankfully no one was digging in the tunnel at the time. The POWs realized they would have to devise another escape plan.

Another member of the group recalled that he—along with several of his comrades—started distilling an adult beverage. Their efforts were so successful that they decided to save a jug of the tasty beverage for another day. As it happened there was a young sapling tree right outside the barracks. They thought it would be a good marker to hide such a treasured creation and dug a hole at the base of the tree to bury their prize for use at a later date.



Remarkably, the person who remembered the incident knew exactly where the prize was buried and began digging. He quickly discovered a glass jug containing a clear liquid that had survived underground for about two and a half decades. He offered several people in the group a taste of the beverage, but no one accepted his offer. The incident raised a few eyebrows and provided some laughs.

Sketch of Camp Trinidad by German POW

During the time we spent with our new friends, I found them to be very kind and peaceful. There were more events that brought our new friends and the cadets closer even together. As this portion of their travels in the United States came to an end, we said goodbye. They went on their way and the cadets traveled to their summer jobs located through the southwest.

One more event exceeds the rewarding time we enjoyed at the beginning of the summer. That fall I returned to Trinidad to finish the cadet program. While I was working in the game room of the Student Union one night, a friend of mine came in with her friend. We exchanged pleasantries and I inquired if she was going to introduce me to her friend. She introduced me to Belinda Ruscetti, and from that day on my focus was on Belinda. She was very attractive, and I definitely wanted to know more about her. Things progressed nicely and Belinda and I became very close ... but that's another story.



Bob & Belinda Christofferson in 1968

In 2025 Trinidad State College will celebrate its Centennial anniversary. Happily, Belinda and I will celebrate fifty-eight years of marriage. It has been a great trip. We have two adult children and five grandchildren. Life has been truly wonderful for us, and we are so thankful that it started at Trinidad State.

I will take this opportunity to thank the administration of TSJC, Guy C. Davis, President, Reuben Gutierrez, Dean of Students, the faculty, staff and the citizens of Trinidad, CO, all of whom contributed in so many ways to make each student feel welcome and help them whenever there was a need. Attending Trinidad State was truly an enjoyable and rewarding experience.

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